



NEWS RELEASE

ORRIN HATCH

United States Senator for Utah

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COMMITTEE STATEMENT: SUPPORT THE WASHINGTON COUNTY GROWTH AND CONSERVATION ACT

Washington - Today the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources considered S. 2835, The Washington County Growth and Conservation Act of 2008. Sen. Orrin G. Hatch (R-Utah) is a cosponsor of the bill and offered the following testimony on its behalf.

Mr. Chairman, let me first thank you and the members of the committee for holding this hearing today. I am pleased that Washington County Commissioner Jim Eardley will be giving his testimony this afternoon. Jim Eardley is a seasoned and wise steward over his county, and no one knows better than he does the difficulty of balancing human needs and the environment in the West. I recommend that the members of this committee consider carefully. He has more of a stake in maintaining his county's beauty and natural resources than anyone else in this hearing room today, but he also must plan for the water, transportation, and recreation needs for one of our nation's driest regions and fastest growing populations.

It is my opinion that Jim Eardley and his companion commissioners are in the best position to find that difficult balance among competing interests, because no other decision maker is forced to consider all of the interests at stake in planning for the future.

Mr. Chairman, this proposal is strong and balanced, because the Washington County commissioners played a central role in its development. I congratulate Senator Bennett for what I consider to be an outstanding job of putting this complicated proposal into a sound legislative package, and I am a proud cosponsor.

Let us consider Washington County for a moment. It is easily one of the most spectacular settings in the nation. It is host to Zion National Park, the Dixie National Forest, the Pine Valley Wilderness, Sand Hollow Reservoir, Snow Canyon State Park, beautiful sand dunes, plenty of red rock cliffs, an important critical habitat reserve for the desert tortoise, and many other valuable natural resources.

For the most part, these resources sit on public lands. Only 16.1 percent of Washington county is private land, which must be shared by the people of the county for their homes and businesses. Mr. Chairman, consider that Washington County's population has doubled every decade since 1970, and that during this period the share of private land has not changed significantly. Clearly the county has some tough decisions to make, and this legislation will go a long way to allowing the county to manage its growth wisely.